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ABSTRACT

Noting that there is a need to understand characteristics of the Head Start program, the children and families it serves, and how these have changed since the last reauthorization in 1998, this policy brief is the first of a series of analyses of Head Start Program Information Report (PIR) data by the Center for Law and Social Policy. All Head Start federal grantees are required to submit PIRs annually to the Department of Health and Human Services, thereby providing a basic snapshot of Head Start children, families, staff, and programs. This report synthesizes key PIR data from the most recently available program year, 2000-2001, and compares these data with those from the 1996-1997 program year. While in most cases the information remains fairly consistent between the 2 years, there are 4 trends meriting particular attention. First, more Head Start families were working full-time and fewer were receiving cash assistance in 2001, leading to greater needs for full-day, full-year child care. Second, more Head Start programs were able to provide children with full-day, full-year services in 2001. Third, median Head Start family income rose to between $9,000 and $11,999 a year in 2001, with the proportion earning less than $15,000 declining slightly. Fourth, Head Start programs have made progress toward a legislative mandate to increase the proportion of teachers with at least an associate's degree to 50 percent by September 2003. (Contains 14 endnotes.) (KB)

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Center for Law and Social Policy
Washington, DC

March 2003

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POLICY BRIEF

Head Start Series

March 2003
Brief No. 1

A Snapshot of Head Start Children, Families, Teachers, and Programs: 1997 and 2001

by Rachel Schumacher and Tanya Rakpraja

With the federal Head Start program scheduled for re-authorization by Congress in 2003, there is a need to understand what the program and the children and families it serves look like today and how they have changed since the last reauthorization in 1998. Head Start, which dates back to 1965, provides federal grants to local agencies for the provision of early education and comprehensive family support services to poor preschool children and their families. In 1995, the Early Head Start program was created for poor families with children from birth to age three and pregnant women. Program practices are governed by federal Head Start Performance Standards and monitored through the regional offices of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS).

Head Start Program Information Reports (PIR), which all federal grantees are required to submit annually to HHS, provide a basic snapshot of Head Start children, families, staff, and programs. In this brief, CLASP first synthesizes key PIR data from the most recently available program year, 2000-2001, and then compares these data with data from the 1996-1997 program year (prior to implementation of the 1998 reauthorization requirements).[1] While in most cases the information remains fairly consistent between the two years, we note four trends that merit particular attention:

- More Head Start families were working full-time and fewer were receiving cash assistance in 2001, leading more parents to report a need for full-day, full-year child care for their children.
- More Head Start programs were able to provide children with full-day, full-year services in 2001, although the proportion of these services available was less than the reported need, and many children required child care arrangements in addition to Head Start.
- Median Head Start family income rose to between $9,000 and $11,999 a year in 2001, and the proportion of families earning less than $15,000 slightly declined. The federal poverty guideline for a family of three in 2001 was $14,630.
- Head Start programs have made progress toward a legislative mandate to increase the proportion of teachers with at least an associate's degree to 50 percent by September 2003.

About the Authors

Rachel Schumacher is a Policy Analyst and Tanya Rakpraja was a Research Assistant at the Center for Law and Social Policy.

Joan Lombardi served as an advisor to this project.

ABOUT THIS SERIES

This policy brief is the first of a series of analyses of Head Start Program Information Report (PIR) data by CLASP. Future briefs will include: a snapshot of new 2002 PIR data and a look at the Early Head Start population of infants and toddlers and their families.

Head Start in the 2001 Program Year: A Snapshot

Head Start Children

The Head Start program has traditionally served preschool children between three and five years old but also reaches a smaller number of children from birth to age three in the Early Head Start and Migrant Head Start programs. In 2001, of the 952,666 children who spent time in Head Start services,[2] the

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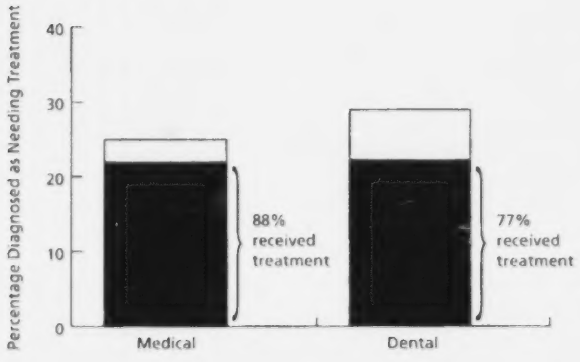
vast majority were between three and five years old (93 percent), including 54 percent four-year-old and 34 percent three-year-old children. Seven percent of the Head Start population was under age three. Just under a third of Head Start children (28 percent) participating in 2001 were in the program for their second or third year. About 16 percent of enrolled Head Start children dropped out at some point during the 2001 program year, although a large majority of these children (83 percent) were replaced by others during the program year.

Islander (1 percent). The dominant language of almost three-quarters (74 percent) of the population was English, while Spanish was the dominant language for 21 percent.

In 2001, Head Start children had a variety of medical, dental, immunization, and mental health needs, and the PIR data captured information about children's assessment and treatment (see Figure 1).[3] Eighty-seven percent of the children received a medical screening, from which 25 percent were assessed as needing treatment, and 88 percent of those children received medical treatment. Of those children who

FIGURE 1

Medical and Dental Diagnosis and Treatment of Head Start Children Who Received Examinations, Program Year 2001



The race/ethnicity of the great majority (94 percent) of children in Head Start was almost evenly divided among the categories of Black (34 percent), Hispanic (30 percent), and White (30 percent). The remaining children were Native American or Alaskan native (3 percent), Asian (2 percent), or Native Hawaiian or other Pacific

received medical treatment, children were most likely to be treated for asthma (23 percent), being overweight (19 percent), and anemia (18 percent). Eighty-one percent of children had a dental exam, with 29 percent being assessed as needing dental care, and 77 percent of those children received dental care. Ninety-four percent of Head Start children had had all the immunizations appropriate for their age, or as many as were possible[4] by the end of the program year. About five percent of the children were referred to mental health services, and just over three-quarters (77 percent) of those referred received such treatment.

In 2001, 12 percent[5] of preschool Head Start children were assessed as having a diagnosed disability. Of these children, only three percent did not receive special education and related services for that disability. Among those children receiving special services, the most common treatment was for a speech or language impairment (59 percent), and the second most common was for non-categorical/developmental delays (17 percent).

Most Head Start children (84 percent) were enrolled in an insurance program in 2001, including 67 percent in Medicaid or the Child Health Insurance Program (CHIP) and 16 percent through private insurance. However, 16 percent were reported as having no health insurance.

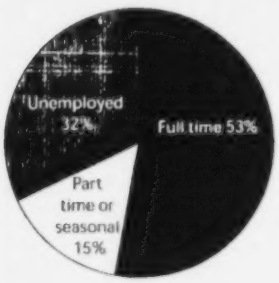
Head Start Families

By design, the Head Start program works directly with low-income children and families to provide both early education and family support and linkages to needed social services. Head Start also involves parents of participating children in the program through volunteer or paid work. Current or former Head Start parents made up 29 percent of program staff and 62 percent of those who volunteered in Head Start programs in 2001.

In 2001, there were 875,754 families with children enrolled in Head

FIGURE 2

Employment Status of Head Start Families' Heads of Household, Program Year 2001



Start programs for some portion of the program year. Sixty-eight percent of the heads of these households were employed—53 percent full-time and 15 percent part-time or seasonally—and 32 percent reported being unemployed (see Figure 2). Eleven percent of Head Start families were in school or training. Median family income was between $9,000 and $11,999 a year, and just over three-quarters (77 percent) of the families had incomes under $15,000 a year. Twenty-four percent of families received Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) cash assistance or benefits.

Just over 47 percent of Head Start families were identified as needing additional community services in 2001[6]—27 percent of families had emergency or crisis assistance needs and 21 percent had education or literacy needs (see Figure 3). Overall, 86 percent of the identified families received services for their individualized need, such as food, shelter, or clothing to address emergency needs.[7]

Head Start Teachers and Programs

Specific Head Start policies were adopted in 1998 to improve teacher quality, education levels, and retention, and Head Start teachers have been at the center of Congressional reauthorization discussions about how best to enhance program quality. In 2001, there were 47,181 Head Start teachers (usually defined as the lead teacher in a classroom) with average full-time earnings of about $21,287.[8] For context, the average annual salary for a kindergarten teacher in a public school was $41,100 in 2001.[9] Forty-five percent of Head Start teachers had an associate's degree or better in early childhood education or a related field, consisting of 19 percent with associate's degrees, 19 percent with bachelor's degrees, three percent with graduate degrees, and another four percent with a degree in family and child studies. Forty-one percent had as their highest level of education a Child Development Associate (CDA) certification or state certificate, seven percent were in CDA training, and a remaining seven percent reported none of these qualifications. The percentage of Head Start teachers who left and were replaced in 2001 was 10 percent. This compares favorably with what is known about the turnover rate for child care teachers in 2000, which is estimated at about 30 percent.[10]

In 2001, 90 percent of Head Start funded children were in center-based programs. Sixty-one percent of children were in centers for five days a week—39 percent for full-day (defined as six hours or more a day) services and 22 percent for part-day. Twenty-nine percent of children were in center-based programs operating on less than a five-day-a-week schedule. The remaining 10 percent of children were reached either through home-based services, combinations of home- and center-based services, or locally designed service models.

FIGURE 3

Percentage of Head Start Families with Need for Additional Community Services, Program Year 2001

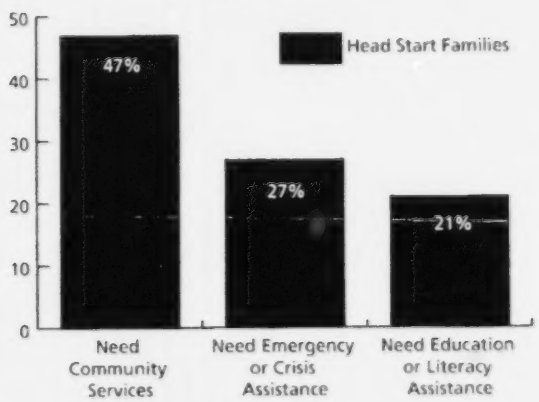


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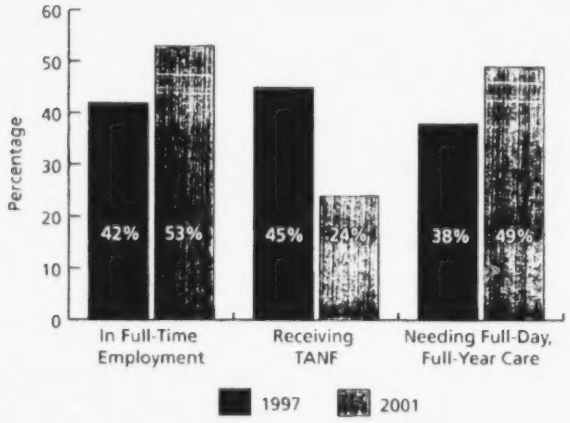
FIGURE 4

Head Start Family Employment, TANF Receipt, and Need for Child Care, Program Years 1997 and 2001



Therefore, the typical Head Start child is in a center five days a week for a full or partial day. These data do not indicate whether these program options were full-year—that is, operating during school vacation periods and the summer months.

What Has Changed Since the 1998 Head Start Reauthorization?

Since 1998, Head Start programs have seen changes in the conditions of their target populations and have sought to meet federal policy changes intended to improve the quality of teachers and early learning for preschool children. The number of children Head Start reached grew by 12 percent between 1997 and 2001, requiring an additional 4,778 classes. When comparing PIR data from these two program years, CLASP found that data on children, families, and programs remained fairly consistent over time. However, a number of notable changes did occur:

- **More Head Start families were working full-time and fewer were receiving cash assistance in 2001, leading more parents to report a need for full-day, full-year child care for their children (see Figure 4).**

The situation of Head Start families in 2001 reflected national trends in the late 1990s, including a major increase in the proportion of single low-income mothers who were employed[11] and a significant decrease in welfare caseloads during the economic boom of that period. Full-time employment for the heads of Head Start family households increased from 42 to 53 percent between 1997 and 2001, while the percentage of Head Start families receiving TANF cash assistance benefits was almost cut in half, from 45 to 24 percent. Parents also reported a greater need for full-day, full-year child care, growing from 38 percent in 1997 to 49 percent in 2001.

- **More Head Start programs were able to provide children with full-day, full-year services in 2001, although the proportion of these services available was less than the reported need, and many children required child care arrangements in addition to Head Start (see Figure 5).**

Head Start programs have traditionally provided part-day services on a school-year schedule, but the 1998 reauthorization encouraged programs to increase their capacity to provide full-day, full-year services to meet working families' needs, either through expansion of the classroom day or through partnerships with community child care agencies, blending funds with child care subsidies. Between 1997 and 2001, Head Start programs increased their capacity to provide full-day, full-year services. Of those families that reported a need for full-day, full-year services, the proportion that received such services through a Head Start program (funded with Head Start only or with blended non-Head Start funds) grew from 25 percent to 42 percent.[12] There was also a slight increase in the proportion of families reporting the use of other public subsidies, such as child care assistance, from 10 to 13 percent. A smaller share of families was able to find relatives or friends to provide

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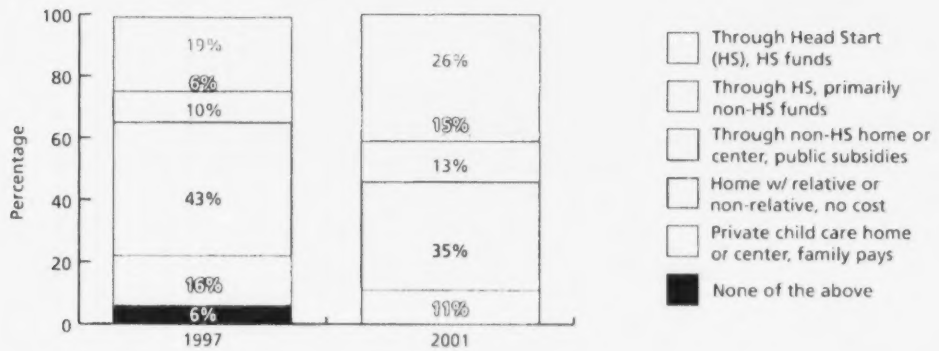
FIGURE 5

Types of Child Care Used By Families Who Need Full-Day, Full-Year Care, Program Years 1997 and 2001



free care for their children at home, falling from 43 percent in 1997 to 35 percent in 2001. And, a smaller percentage of families reported paying for private child care in a home or center-based arrangement, from 16 percent in 1997 to 11 percent in 2001.

- **Median Head Start family income rose to $9,000-$11,999 a year in 2001, and the proportion of families earning less than $15,000 fell. The federal poverty guideline for a family of three in 2001 was $14,630 (see Figure 6).**

Median family income in the 1997 program year was between $6,000 and $8,999, while in 2001 it was between $9,000 and $11,999. The proportion of Head Start families with income over $15,000 grew (from 13 percent to 23 percent), but this figure does not indicate the

FIGURE 6

Income Levels for Head Start Families, Program Years 1997 and 2001

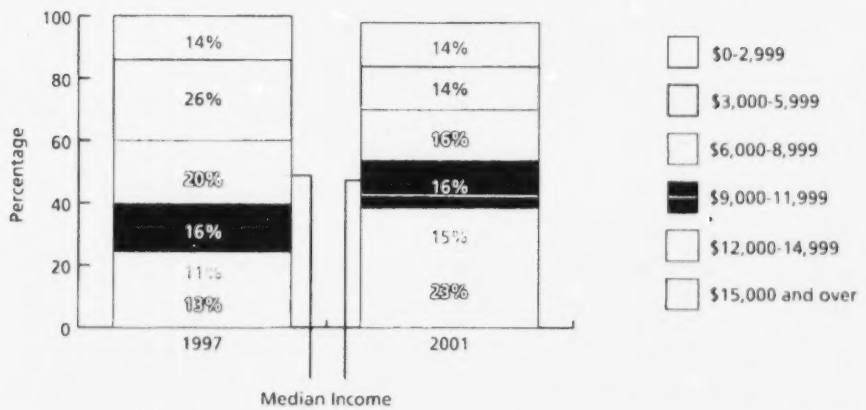


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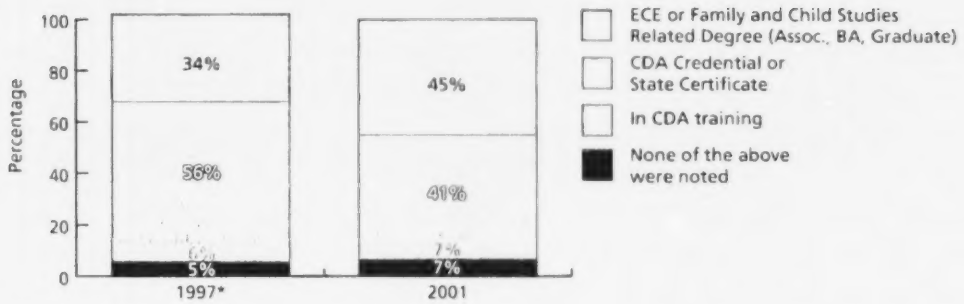
FIGURE 7

Qualifications of Head Start Teachers, Program Years 1997 to 2001



* Due to rounding, percentages add up to more than 100%.
Note: ECE = Early Childhood Education; CDA = Child Development Associate

proportion of families that remained under the federal poverty level because it is not linked to family size. The federal HHS poverty guideline rose from $13,330 to $14,630 for a family of three between 1997 and 2001. Head Start programs may enroll low-income families, defined as those families with income at or below the poverty guidelines, families receiving public assistance, or a child in foster care. At least 90 percent of enrolled families must meet this definition of low-income. Once enrolled, children are eligible through the end of the succeeding program year.

- **Head Start programs have made progress toward a legislative mandate to increase the proportion of teachers with at least an associate's degree by September 2003, but they had not yet reached that goal as of 2001 (see Figure 7).**

Congress mandated that 50 percent of the Head Start teacher population attain an associate's degree or higher, with a specialization in early childhood education or a related field, by September 2003. Between 1997 and 2001, the proportion of teachers meeting this standard grew from 34 percent to 45 percent. Although 2002 PIR data are not publicly available, the Head Start Bureau recently announced that the percentage of teachers meeting this standard in 2002 was 51 percent.[13]

What to Expect in Future Head Start PIR Data Collection

For the 2002 PIR program year, HHS will release updated data for many of the categories described in this brief, as well as the first year of expanded data collection from an overhaul of the PIR survey questions. These new data will include:

- more child information, such as how many children are in Head Start for a full work-day, receive child care subsidies, are without health insurance, and are being served in child care partnerships;
- more family information, such as family structure and parents' education level;
- more teacher information, such as non-English language proficiency, salary by level of education, reasons for turnover, and number of non-degreed teachers working toward a degree; and
- more program information, such as curriculum models, assessment tools, father involvement activities, and coordination with schools for transition to kindergarten.[14]

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Endnotes

1 Percentages calculated by CLASP from U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Head Start Bureau, Program Information Report (PIR) data for the 2000-2001 program year, unless otherwise noted. Calculations for the 1996-1997 program year from the PIR data for that year prepared by Xtria, LLC for the Administration for Children and Families, Head Start Bureau. Head Start program years run from September to August, not according to the federal fiscal year calendar of October to September, so CLASP calculations may differ slightly from figures posted by the Head Start Bureau for a fiscal year. (Hereafter, for simplicity's sake, we refer to the 1996-1997 program year as 1997 and the 2000-2001 program year as 2001.) This brief includes only a subset of the PIR data; for more details please visit the CLASP website at http://www.clasp.org.

2 The PIR collects data on all children who participated in the program at any point in the year, including those who do not complete the year; this figure is not simply the number of funded slots in the program.

3 CLASP's calculations of the percentages of children who received medical screenings, dental exams, and immunizations or were referred to mental health specialists may slightly under-represent the percentage of children who completed the program year and received these services, because there is no way to adjust the figures to exclude those children who dropped out of Head Start within 45 calendar days.

4 Children who have all the immunizations allowable at a certain point are those who are not on the schedule recommended for their age group but have been brought up to date to the maximum extent they can be given a late start on their immunization schedule.

5 CLASP's calculation of the percentage of children diagnosed with a disability is slightly less than the Head Start Bureau figure of 13 percent and may slightly under-represent the percentage of children, because we do not exclude those children who dropped out of the program in less than 45 days.

6 Data from U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Head Start Bureau, Head Start Program Information Reports, 2000-2001. *Family Information Report — National Level Summary*.

7 Data from U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Head Start Bureau, Head Start Program Information Reports, 2000-2001. *Multi-Year Performance Indicators Report, 1998-2001*.

8 Not all programs responded to this question, so the data may not accurately reflect the national average for all Head Start teachers.

9 2001 National Occupational Employment and Wage Estimates, http://www.bls.gov/oes/2001/oes252012.htm

10 Based on a study of California staffing; no current national data are available. See Whitebrook, M., Sakai, L., Gerber, E., & Howes, C. (2001). *Then & Now: Changes in Child Care Staffing, 1994-2000*. Washington, DC: Center for the Child Care Workforce and Institute of Industrial Relations, University of California, Berkeley.

11 Between 1997 and 2000, CPS data indicate that the percentage of single mothers with children under age six and under 200 percent of the federal poverty level who were employed grew from 50.4 to 58.5 percent. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (2002). Table 4:1 Employment Status of Single and Married Mothers, 1988-2000. *TANF Fourth Annual Report to Congress*. Washington, DC: Author.

12 Due to rounding, adding the 2001 percentages in Figure 5 for families with children in full-day, full-year Head Start paid through Head Start funds (26.3 percent) to families with children in Head Start served through some non-Head Start funds (15.4 percent) equals 42 percent.

13 Head Start Meets Goal for Trained Teachers. (2002). *Report on Preschool Programs, 35*(3), 19-20.

14 *Head Start Program Information Report User's Guide*. (2002). Prepared by Xtria, LLC for the Administration for Children and Families, Head Start Bureau.

CLASP POLICY BRIEF

CENTER FOR LAW AND SOCIAL POLICY

Head Start Series

March 2003
Brief No. 1

ABOUT CLASP

The Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP), a national nonprofit organization founded in 1968, conducts research, legal and policy analysis, technical assistance, and advocacy related to economic security for low-income families with children.

CLASP's child care and early education work focuses on promoting policies that support both child development and the needs of low-income working parents and on expanding the availability of resources for child care and early education initiatives. CLASP examines the impact of welfare reform on child care needs; studies the relationships between child care subsidy systems, the Head Start Program, pre-kindergarten efforts, and other early education initiatives; and explores how these systems can be responsive to the developmental needs of all children, including children with disabilities.

CLASP POLICY BRIEF
Head Start Series, No. 1

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